

Report Number 8 from the Peace Section
Task Force on Women in Church and Society
January - May 1975

TRANSNATIONAL TASK FORCE HOLDS FIRST MEETING

The new transnational Task Force on Women in Church and Society met for the first time April 5. The six member committee is composed of three Canadians and three Americans. Those appointed to the Task Force for one-year terms are:

Erna Klassen, 3516-113 St., Edmonton, Alberta T6J 1K9 - fulltime employee of Aid Services of Edmonton, the central information/referral service; secretary of the Mennonite Conference of Alberta; member on the nominating committee for the Alberta Conference; Alberta representative on the nominating committee for the Conference of Mennonites in Canada in 1975; mother of four teenagers.

Dorothy Yoder Nyce, 1603 S. 15th St., Goshen, IN 46526 - continuing member of the Task Force; part-time seminary student; WNSC representative to the MCC Peace Section (U.S.); member of the MCC Advisory Group on employment practices and policies; mother of two.

Margaret Loewen Reimer, 11 Theresa St., Kitchener, Ontario N2G 1M2 - assistant editor of the Mennonite Reporter; graduate of Canadian Mennonite Bible College and the University of Manitoba.

Sue Clemmer Steiner, 126 Overlea Drive, Kitchener, Ontario - buyer of adult non-religious books and children's books for Provident Bookstores in Canada; graduate of Goshen College; free-lance writer for Mennonite periodicals.

Katie Funk Wiebe, Tabor College, Hillsboro, KS 67063; assistant professor of English, free-lance writer, especially for the Mennonite Brethren press.

Luann Habegger, 3003 Benham Ave., Elkhart, IN 46514 - continuing member of the Task Force; student at Mennonite Biblical Seminary; former administrative assistant for the Washington Office of the MCC Peace Section; Goshen College graduate.

Ted Koontz, Executive Secretary of the Peace Section (U.S.), will be the MCC staff member relating to the Task Force. Task Force members welcome and encourage your ideas and responses.

MCC ACTS ON TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION

In the last issue of the Report, mention was made that the Peace Section passed a resolution urging MCC to study the effects of its employment practices and policies on women. The issue was brought to the attention of the Peace Section by the Task Force. In January Dorothy Yoder Nyce, on behalf of the Task Force, presented a paper on women in church vocations at the MCC annual meeting. "Women still bleed. Perhaps some hemorrhage, their faith tugging at the robes of the church whose institutions prove insensitive to the touch because of the crowds, society." Jesus' response to the woman who touched his garment was "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

Jesus called upon the woman to repeat the good news to those she encountered. He makes this demand of both women and men. In order that all may participate fully

in carrying out this task, there will need to be greater sensitivity toward women in MCC and church organizations. This will likely require structural changes that will incorporate or enhance capacities in women which have often been overlooked. Dorothy, along with five others, has been asked by the MCC Executive Committee to serve on the advisory group which will be reviewing matters related to the recruitment, assignment, and services of women in MCC programs.

TASK FORCE DISCUSSES FUTURE PROJECTS

The Task Force decided at its April 8 meeting to continue the periodic Reports. Sue Clemmer Steiner and Margaret Loewen Reimer will be editing the paper after this issue. The next Report will likely be mailed in September. Tentative plans are to prepare four newsletters annually.

Another project being pursued by the Task Force is the possible printing of a second packet of materials. This packet, a follow-up to PERSONS BECOMING, would have a greater focus on third world women. The Task Force is also considering establishing contact persons in Mennonite colleges who would supply the Task Force with the names of women for a Person Resource Pool. The college contact would also keep us posted on women's courses and student papers concerning women in church and society.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

* CONFERENCE ON SINGLENESS: Herta Funk, Director of Adult Education and Women's Concerns for the General Conference Mennonite Church, is planning a conference on The Church and Single Adults. The August 14-17 conference will be held at the Columbia Bible Institute in Clearbrook, British Columbia. Herta would like your suggestions for the meeting's content and format. Address mail to Box 347, Newton, KS 67114.

* ANABAPTIST WOMEN: August 1, 1975 is the deadline for manuscripts on Anabaptist women. "Women in the Anabaptist tradition who have made a contribution to church and society" is the sole limitation of the subject. The biographies may be used in Mennonite publications, a booklet, packets, and/or Mennonite historical libraries. Fifteen manuscripts will be selected. Writers of the selected manuscripts will receive the current rate paid by The Mennonite. Here's a good opportunity to uncover a long neglected dimension of our history. For more details, write Herta.

* CONFERENCE ON WOMEN AND THE CHURCH: Canadian Women and Religion, an interdenominational organization, is planning for a conference in Saskatoon on October 17-19. The conference, primarily for women in Western Canada, will be limited to around 250 women, 55 from each of the four western provinces, 15 from the Yukon, and 15 from the Northwest Territories.

The conference will be focusing on (1) the role played by the church in the subordination of women and the 'spiritual' legitimating of the subordination; (2) the socialization process operative within the church; and (3) tools for effecting change. An application form to attend the conference is available from Canadian Women and Religion, 1332 Osler St., Saskatoon, Sask. S7N 0V2. Erna Klassen, Task Force member, Martha Nickel, and other Mennonites are involved in the planning.

Our Apologies: It was incorrectly stated in the last newsletter that "three of the six names appearing on the ballot for election to the General Board of the General Conference Mennonite Church were names of women. Three persons were elected--all male." We have been informed that four were elected, one of whom is a woman. Irene Dunn was elected to a six year term, the second woman to be on this formerly all male board. Our congratulations, Irene!

GROUPS MEET TO DISCUSS WOMEN'S CONCERNS

We hear much these days about the popularity of The Total Woman and Fascinating Womanhood. The attraction for this type of literature has not bypassed the Mennonite churches. Fortunately, however, there are other contexts in which women are discussing the biblical concept of personhood. Sixty-five women, mostly from the Western District of the General Conference, met December 27-28 in Newton. Dotty Janzen presented a Biblical survey on women and suggested guidelines on how to interpret the Bible. A drama, films, and small group discussions were part of this "Accent on Women."

Discussions on women in church and society are also the focus of some college classes. At Bethel College, Anna Juhnke is teaching a course on Women and Religion. Women in Victorian Literature is the title of a class taught at Goshen College by Sara Hartzler. Bluffton College offered three courses this year: Creative Use of Woman Power (Lois Rodabaugh), The Woman as Heroine in Literature (Linda Falk Suter), and, The Woman as Artist (Mary Ann Sullivan).

For the second year in a row, the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries offered the course, Women in Church and Society. One hundred freshmen enrolled in "Man and Society" at Tabor College. The Tabor students used PERSONS BECOMING as one of their texts.

WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION ON CHURCH COMMITTEES

As part of her fulfillment for a social science seminar at Bethel College, Janette Zercher made a thorough study of "The Organizational Role of Women in the Churches of Three Mennonite Conferences." She analyzed responses from 27 churches to the questionnaire she developed. She sent the questionnaire to GC, MC, and MB churches in a five-state region. Janette discovered that "there is a hierarchy in the Mennonite Church in spite of our Anabaptist credence to the contrary." Only one of ten judges asked to rank committees on the basis of their impact and significance thought that all of them were equally important. Aside from this one comment, the general ranking of importance was along the following lines: (1) Worship; (2) Board of Elders/Deacons; (3) Administrative or Church Council; (4) Education; (5) Trustees; (6) Music; (7) Extension; (8) Fellowship; (9) Service; (10) Peace and Relief; (11) Library; (12) Nursery; (13) Flower.

The charts shown on the following page indicate that:

- (1) the largest percentage of committee members at the top of the structural hierarchy are men;
- (2) the largest percentage of committee members at the bottom of the structural hierarchy are women;
- (3) except for the education committee, those committees with a large percentage of females contain a small percentage of the total population; (While women rank high on the worship committee, few churches actually have such a structure. Furthermore, there is a great diversity in the function of this committee.)
- (4) husband and wife teams frequently serve on middle committees - extension, fellowship, service;
- (5) men are consistently associated with roles involving monetary and major church decisions. Women are consistently appointed to education, library, nursery, and flower committees.

COLUMN PERCENTAGES FOR ALL CHURCHES
Percentage of Female/Male Committee Composition

	1.Worsh.	2.Board	3.Admin.	4.Educa.	5.Trust.	6.Music	7.Exten.
Female	55.6	10.2	18.3	56.8	1.0	65.5	44.6
Male	44.4	89.8	81.7	43.2	99.0	34.5	55.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<u>8.Fell. 9.Serv. 10. Pea. 11.Libr. 12.Nurs. 13.Flow.</u>							
Female	58.0	50.0	23.3	94.0	83.3	97.0	40.1
Male	42.0	50.0	76.7	6.0	16.7	3.0	59.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

ROW PERCENTAGES FOR ALL CHURCHES
Percentage of Total Female/Male Population Found on each Committee

	1.Worsh.	2.Board	3.Admin.	4.Educa.	5.Trust.	6.Music	7.Exten.
Female	2.4	2.4	9.7	20.0	.2	13.8	8.0
Male	1.3	14.2	28.9	10.2	16.0	4.8	6.6
	1.7	9.5	21.2	14.1	9.7	8.4	7.2
<u>8.Fell. 9.Serv. 10. Pea. 11.Libr. 12.Nurs. 13.Flow. Total</u>							
Female	12.3	5.1	3.4	11.4	3.6	7.7	100.0
Male	6.0	3.4	7.4	.5	.5	.2	100.0
	8.5	4.1	5.8	4.8	1.7	3.2	100.0

1975 - INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S YEAR

This year has been designated as International Women's Year by the United Nations. The official emblem for IWY is a stylized dove, the biological symbol for women, and the mathematical sign for equality. This emblem incorporates the three themes of IWY - equality, development, and peace. As stated in literature prepared by the UN, "This is a logical linkage, for without equality for women adequate rates of economic and social development progress can never be achieved, and, failing such progress, there are diminished chances for peace." Many conferences and workshops are being held as part of IWY. The major conference will be held in Mexico City June 19 - July 2. Herta Funk and Luann Habegger are planning to attend the non-governmental Tribune that will be running in conjunction with the conference for government delegates.



The goal for 1975 is to start breaking down barriers which prevent women from sharing both the responsibilities and the fulfillments that are the birthright of all humankind. Even such basic rights as the right to read have been denied millions of women. Within the course of ten years (1960-70), the number of illiterate men rose by 8 million, that of illiterate women by 40 million. The chart below further illustrates the magnitude of the task ahead.

IWY—AS A MATTER OF FACT

	MORE DEVELOPED AREAS		LESS DEVELOPED AREAS	
Female adult illiteracy	Europe North America	4.7% 1.9%	Africa Asia Latin America	83.7% 56.7% 27.3%
Percentage of females studying at: Primary level	Europe North America	87.8% 88.2%	Africa Asia Latin America	32.9% 45.2% 66.3%
Secondary level	Europe North America	32.4% 61.5%	Africa Asia Latin America	19.0% 27.9% 25.6%
University level	Europe North America	5.0% 8.0%	Africa Asia Latin America	2.0% 3.8% 4.5%
Percentage of women economically active	Europe North America	29.4% 25.0%	Africa Asia Latin America	26.3% 21.5% 17.1%
Percentage of economically active women employed in agriculture	Europe North America	23.0% 2.5%	Africa Asia Latin America	49.0% 52.0% 12.0%
Percentage of women between the ages of 15 and 19 who are married, divorced or widowed	Europe North America	6.7% 9.9%	Africa Asia Latin America	40.7% 27.9% 15.2%
Average of number of children	Europe North America	Between 2 and 4	Africa Asia Latin America	Between 5 and 7
Life expectancy		74 years		55 years
Women in national parliaments—some examples:	Denmark Finland USSR	17% 21.5% 38%	Egypt Trinidad & Tobago India	2% 7% 2.3%

As part of our focus on IWY, the Task Force thought that it would be appropriate to examine the relationship of a North American woman to the women she encounters in another culture. Many Mennonite women have served overseas in an MCC or mission board assignment. Questions frequently raised are: What is the attitude toward a single woman? Should a foreigner speak out against what she regards as discriminatory and unjust treatment of her sisters? Nelda Thelin, who taught midwifery in a hospital, university, and rural setting in Nigeria and Ghana for eight years, responds to these questions in the following two articles. Nelda first worked with the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities. She and her husband will be returning to Ghana this summer under the United Church Board of World Mission. Nelda will be continuing her work in a rural health program.

A SINGLE WOMAN GOES TO AFRICA
Nelda Thelin

Awakening in a Lagos Hotel, seeing people carrying things on their heads and women with babies on their backs, and hearing strange languages was like a continuing dream. Later I was met by missionaries and taken on a long hot journey to my new home. Of course, there was a lot of hospital business to take care of on our way, and I followed the nursing director through a very noisy and crowded market looking for material for sheets, uniforms, etc. I was still wearing my nylon stockings which I soon shed, never to put on again until I reached Europe two years later.

I soon settled into my new quarters with another single woman. The development of a midwifery training school, contacts with other schools and teachers, and the experience of learning from students, patients and other nurse midwives was pure pleasure. The other North American missionaries on the "compound" became my family. These relationships mean a great deal to the single person abroad.

One primary frustration was my inability to learn to know the Africans on a very personal basis. Although I did go into the town, to market, church, and other functions and also spent a weekend in the home of one of the staff members, it seemed that something was missing. Was it because I was a 28 year old single woman? Wherever I went the greetings were: "How is your husband?", "How are your children?" It seemed easier to just give the usual reply of "ka" than to offer truthful explanations. Anyways, would they have believed me? It felt as though the single person must be suspected of having affairs on the side and, in fact, there were opportunities.

To an African woman, having children is of prime importance. Her purpose in living would seem to be unmet if she cannot "bring forth". If she does not become pregnant, the reason must surely be hers and may be cause for divorce or polygamous marriage. She may be ridiculed. She is sent from one possible source of help to another. Even though she "adopts" many children, she still feels unfulfilled. And, it even seems at times that having children is more important than living with a husband.

How does the foreign single woman fit into this culture if she does decide to make Africa her home? One woman, who has spent many years in Africa, said that her "cross" was to be a single woman living in Africa. She does not feel really free with Africans.

I have gone to Africa twice. The first time I went as a single person and the second time, married and a mother. It was fun to be single and free. It is easier to be married and a mother, especially when teaching mothers and pregnant women. If one can accept and like one's own singleness, it doesn't really matter where one lives or what others may think. I would affirm that single women can make a contribution in Africa.

CUSTOM OR INJUSTICE
Nelda Thelin

A young African woman arrived one night at the doorstep of the pastor's home. She begged him to take her in and promised to leave the next day. She was running from her elderly husband whom she did not love. Her husband had been beating her. The pastor and his family took her in. Early the next morning, before the girl awoke, he went to her village to inform the husband of her whereabouts. As the weeping girl was taken away, the pastor remarked, "Well, they will beat her for a few days and then she will know her place. That is the custom here." This young woman was probably

betrothed to her present husband while she was still a very young child because of the friendship between her father and husband. There may have been many gifts received by her family for her father's generosity in giving his daughter to this friend. Her husband may even have paid her school fees through secondary school. The whole situation is complicated.

Women who come to the family planning clinic for insertion of the loop may ask if their husbands will feel it. A young school girl comes at night to the home of the family planning nurse, seeking help because she is pregnant and her "family won't have her and neither will the boy." Just prior to this another young woman died as a result of an attempted abortion by a school teacher friend. School girls are pressured into sleeping with a teacher in order to pass an examination. Other young women may be required to sleep with a possible employer before they can have a chance at a job. The rules of the church state that pre-marital sexual relations are wrong. The law forbids abortions except for medical reasons. Everyone knows what the traditional standards are but, when in conflict with the demands of modern society, what can one do?

Many women are tired of bringing forth children, especially after their 10th or 12th pregnancy. They work hard all day in the fields, carry water or firewood, and take care of their usual household chores. Pregnancy every two or three years depletes their body iron supplies. They die before they reach 50 years of age. Yet their husbands or uncles (in matrilineal societies) insist that they bear more and more children. Their children, too, are often hungry because there is not enough food to go around. Perhaps one-half of them have already died. Their husbands may be using contraceptives when they visit their girl friends but for their wives--NEVER!

This is obviously a one-sided presentation of some problems facing African women. It is not a generalization but rather an attempt to present examples of experiences which many African women have. Is there any way in which a foreign woman can help her African sister? Should she plead ignorance of these "customs" and not get involved? Should she follow the custom and support the stronger element in the society? Will the Christian woman respond differently than the non-Christian? Christ, himself, broke with many of the local customs, especially those concerning "injustice" to women: the woman caught in adultery, the Samaritan woman at the well, the woman who bought costly ointment and anointed his feet, and even Mary, who preferred to listen to Jesus rather than to do the customary thing of preparing a fine meal.



The foreign woman in Africa can attempt to learn as much as possible about the various customs. She can initiate discussions with African Christians as to the Christian response to certain customs or attitudes. When faced with a request for her help she can first investigate all the possible angles to the problem before deciding how or if to help, or she may decide to help just because someone has come to her in need and she can give the assistance requested. Always she can question what she sees and hears, and she can be a listening sister.

The drawing at the left is taken from a packet of materials entitled Women, a collection of articles written by women around the world. For your copy, send \$1.50 to Women, P.O. Box 187, Dayton View Station, Dayton, Ohio 45406.

THIRD WORLD PERSPECTIVES

As a way of familiarizing ourselves during International Women's Year with the concerns of Third World women, we have drawn from a number of recent articles which have been published on the subject. These selections are mere glimpses but indicate currents of thought and development in various countries. How will change come? In an issue of UNICEF News, Margaret Gaan writes: "It takes more than just job training to enable women to take an upward step in their status. That step is not simply one of increased earning power. It involves learning more about the world, of gaining confidence, of conceiving relationships other than the fixed ones of the family and immediate community, of achieving new worth and dignity in their own eyes."

CUBA: Fidel Castro has said that "A society where women are not incorporated into work will always be a poor society because it will depend on only part of the people working." In order to allow women to become active contributors to Cuba's economy, the country has established a network of day care centers and boarding schools. Birth control information and devices are free. Since Castro took power in 1959, the number of employed women has jumped from 194,000 - 590,000. While women hold many types of jobs, it is still unusual to find them in leadership positions.

COLOMBIA: Olga Lucia Alvarez B. is the director of the Colombian Service of Social Communication, a Roman Catholic group which works among the poor and publishes articles having to do with Christian involvement in the struggle for social justice. She writes that women have become an adornment in a world created by and for men. She speaks of a "pedestal of oppression" due to Napoleonic civil codes, the moral codes of the church fathers, and an education into submission. "Liberation for our women is not something that we can expect to come to us from abroad in the form of imported models that carry with them ideological structures that are alien to our own. The new Latin American woman will emerge to answer the necessities of her own situation."

SWITZERLAND: In 1971 women were given the franchise. European feminists maintain that Swiss women's rights have not gone much further. As if to confirm male dominance as government policy, the Swiss economics ministry in 1973 awarded "housewives' diplomas" to those who passed a three-day test in washing dishes, scrubbing floors, and other 'feminine' chores.

KUWAIT: It is still a serious misdemeanor for a young unmarried woman to take a walk with a man. Marriage arrangements are made through a matchmaker. Married women cover their bodies with black abaiyas and veil their faces in public. More than 2,000 scholarship students from this oil-rich country are studying abroad - none of them women.

PHILLIPINES: Dolores Feria and many third world women accuse American women of tacitly consenting to systems that enslave millions of Asian women. In an article reprinted in the Dayton, Ohio, packet entitled WOMEN, Feria states that "Women's Lib strikes a strangely discordant note in every major Asian country: for it can clearly belong only in the vocabulary of the overfed women of the world. . . . Women on the march do not deny the issues raised by Women's Lib; they only question their order of priority and that chiefly women of the privileged classes stand to benefit from Women's Lib. As long as the women of the barrio must be beasts of burden, their children discriminated against by an economic system where they have no power stakes and their husbands aged beyond their years by the kind of crushing poverty that dictates the superstructure of the relation between men and women, Women's Lib is well meaning but naive."